

Message Text

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FM AMEMBASSY DAMASCUS

TO SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 4077

C O N F I D E N T I A L DAMASCUS 4674

FROM AMBASSADOR

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: OVIP (VANCE, CYRUS)

SUBJECT: SECRETARY'S MIDDLE EAST TRIP - SYRIAN PROGRAM

REF: STATE 173059

1. IT WILL BE THREE DAYS BEFORE KHADDAM RETURNS FROM INDONESIA AND SYRIANS START TO DEVELOP THEIR OWN PROGRAM SUGGESTIONS FOR SECRETARY'S TRIP TO DAMASCUS. WOULD LIKE TO HAVE SUGGESTIONS IN THIS MESSAGE CONSIDERED BY SECRETARY AND MRS. VANCE SO WE COULD SUBMIT THEM AS THEIR PREFERENCES BEFORE SYRIAN IDEAS GET TABLED.

2. PARTY WILL BE MET AT AIRPORT BY FONMIN AND MRS. KHADDAM WHO WILL ACCOMPANY SECRETARY AND MRS. VANCE TO HOTEL. NORMALLY, THE KHADDAMS STAY A FEW MOMENTS AT THE HOTEL AND THEN LEAVE THEIR GUESTS TO REST PRIOR TO ANY OFFICIAL PROGRAMMING. THAT PERIOD WILL PROVIDE AMPLE TIME FOR MEETING WITH ME WHICH SECRETARY HAS REQUESTED.

3. I BELIEVE THE KHADDAMS WILL PROPOSE AN OFFICIAL DINNER THAT EVENING WITH THEM AS HOSTS. THIS COULD BE KEPT SMALL BUT WOULD INCLUDE LADIES. WOULD ESTIMATE TOTAL NUMBER AT TABLE ON ORDER OF THIRTY.

4. IF SECRETARY WISHES RETURN THIS DINNER, SIMILAR SIZE GROUP
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COULD BE ACCOMMODATED ON RESIDENCE TERRACE THE FOLLOWING EVENING.

5. KHADDAM WILL PROBABLY WISH SEPARATE MEETING WITH SECRETARY MORNING OF AUGUST 4 PRIOR TO MEETING ASSAD. (ASSAD NORMALLY SCHEDULES NO MEETINGS PRIOR 1100). I WILL TACTFULLY GET POINT ACROSS TO PRESIDENCY THAT SECRETARY WISHES SPEND MAXIMUM TIME POSSIBLE WITH PRESIDENT.

6. SUGGEST LUNCH BE PRIVATE AT HOTEL.

7. WILL SCHEDULE NO SIDE TRIPS FOR SECRETARY BUT WOULD MUCH APPRECIATE HIS WILLINGNESS PAY BRIEF VISIT TO AMERICAN PAVILLION AT DAMASCUS FAIR WHICH BY THEN WILL HAVE BEEN OPEN TEN DAYS. PAVILLION FEATURES WIDE VARIETY OF US COMMERCIAL AND INDUSTRIAL PRODUCTS AND AS CENTERPIECE WILL DISPLAY MARS LANDER SENT HERE BY NASA. SECRETARY'S VISIT WOULD PROVIDE USEFUL SYMBOL OF USG INTEREST IN OUR BILATERAL ECONOMIC ASSISTANCE AND TRADE WITH SYRIA. IF SECRETARY AGREEABLE, TIMING OF VISIT WOULD BE ARRANGED TO AVOID CROWDS, IN EARLY MORNING (APPROX 0830) BEFORE OPENING OF FAIR THAT DAY TO PUBLIC, EITHER AUGUST 4 OR 5. AS GESTURE OF COURTESY SECRETARY SHOULD ALSO PLAN VISIT SYRIAN PAVILION, SHORT DISTANCE FROM OUR OWN. TOTAL TIME FOR BOTH PAVILLIONS: 45 MINUTES MAX. FAIRGROUND LOCATED DIRECTLY OPPOSITE MERIDIEN HOTEL WHERE PARTY WILL BE STAYING.

8. MRS. VANCE'S PROGRAM.

SYRIA IS EXTRAORDINARILY RICH IN ARCHEOLOGICAL SITES. DAMASCUS ITSELF FEATURES: THE OMAYYAD MOSQUE, A REMARKABLE BUILDING WHICH ONCE WAS CHRISTIAN BASILICA AND THE EXCELLENT (AND COMPACT) NATIONAL MUSEUM GIVING AN OVERVIEW OF THE 4,500 YEARS OF RECORDED HISTORY IN THIS COUNTRY. THERE IS ALSO THE AZEM PALACE, EIGHTEENTH CENTURY GOVERNOR'S RESIDENCE WITH FOLK ART COLLECTION AND SEVERAL 15TH-17TH CENTURY FORMERLY PRIVATE HOMES

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WHICH HAVE FINE EXAMPLES OF TRADITIONAL DAMASCUS ARCHITECTURE AND DECORATION. DAMASCUS SOUK ITSELF IS RENOWNED FOR ITS BROCADES, ANTIQUE BRASS AND COPPER, POTTERY AND ROMAN GLASS.

9. HOWEVER, THERE ARE WORLD FAMOUS ARCHEOLOGICAL SITES OUTSIDE OF THE CAPITAL. ONLY PROBLEM IS TIME AVAILABLE. AMONG THE FINEST RUINS ARE

A. PALMYRA, THE THIRD CENTURY DESERT CAPITAL OF QUEEN ZENOBIA

B. CRAC DE CHEVALIER, THE BEST PRESERVED CRUSADER CASTLE IN THE MIDDLE EAST AND

C. THE ROMAN AMPHITHEATRE OF BOSRA.

TO VISIT ANY ONE OF THESE SITES WILL TAKE SEVERAL HOURS. TRAVEL TO ONLY ONE OF THEM, PALMYRA, COULD BE DONE BY AIRCRAFT. IF MRS. VANCE WISHES TRAVEL OUTSIDE THE CAPITAL, THE SYRIAN GOVERNMENT I BELIEVE WOULD BE PLEASED TO OFFER HER USE OF A SMALL AIRPLANE OR HELICOPTER, AS THEY HAVE DONE ON PREVIOUS VISITS BY HONORED GUESTS. OF THESE THREE SITES I WOULD PERSONALLY RECOMMEND PALMYRA BUT IT WOULD BE FEASIBLE TO DO ONLY IF MRS.

VANCE PREPARED LEAVE HOTEL AT 0530 FOR TAKEOFF FROM DAMASCUS AIRPORT AT 0600 FOR THE HALF HOUR FLIGHT. THE SITE IS AT ITS MOST DRAMATIC IN THE EARLY MORNING OR LATE AFTERNOON LIGHT. FURTHERMORE, AT THIS TIME OF THE YEAR, WHEN TEMPERATURES CAN CLIMB ABOVE 115 DEGREES FAHRENHEIT IN THE DESERT, I ADVISE AGAINST VISITING PALMYRA IN MID-DAY/AFTERNOON. FOR BOTH REASONS, SHE SHOULD PLAN LEAVE PALMYRA TO RETURN DAMASCUS BY ABOUT 1000 HOURS. ON RETURN SHE COULD OVERFLY THE CRAC DE CHEVALIER AND SHE WOULD STILL HAVE TIME TO VISIT SOME POINTS MENTIONED ABOVE IN DAMASCUS.

10. THE ONLY SEPARATE SOCIAL FUNCTION FOR MRS. VANCE WHICH SYRIANS MAY SUGGEST WOULD BE A TEAM GIVEN BY MRS. KHADDAM. HOWEVER, I RECOMMEND WE ASK FOR AN APPOINTMENT FOR MRS. VANCE
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TO CALL ON MRS. ASSAD, IF PRESIDENT'S WIFE IN TOWN, ACCOMPANIED BY MRS. KHADDAM AND MY WIFE.

11. ACTION REQUESTED. ADVISE SECRETARY AND MRS. VANCE'S DESIRES ON:

A. DINNER AUGUST 3 (APPROX TWO HOURS AFTER ARRIVAL AT HOTEL) WITH THE KHADDAMS AS HOSTS.

B. A RETURN DINNER FOR KHADDAMS AT THE RESIDENCE AUGUST 4.

C. VISIT BY SECRETARY TO THE US PAVILLION.

D. VISIT BY MRS. VANCE TO PALMYRA.

E. TEA FOR MRS. VANCE, IF SUGGESTED BY MRS. KHADDAM.

F. CALL BY MRS. VANCE ON MRS. ASSAD.

G. ADVISE NAMES OF MEMBERS OF HIS PARTY WHOM SECRETARY WISHES INCLUDED IN DINNERS, IF ACCEPTED, FOR AUGUST 3 AND 4.
MURPHY

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